

"THE DIVINE SARA" 67 TODAY, IS AS ENERGETIC AND ECCENTRIC AS EVER

Richer by \$250,000 of American Money, the "Rare and Winning" Diva Is Living Her Ideal Life on the Brittany Coast, Her Extravagance Unchecked—Owning the Secret of Perpetual Youth, Madame Bernhardt Dreads Not Even Seventy Years.

"CAN it be she is sixty-one today, our 'Divine Sara'?" asks Paris. This is her birthday, surely, and she is at least that old—it may even be sixty-two! For the contradictory records of her birth quarrel between the years 1841 and 1845. Perhaps even the great tragedienne herself may not certainly settle the matter; the memories, which she has been writing of late, do not answer the question. However, the register at the conservatoire, where "Rosine Bernhardt" (without the "h") won a prize when seventeen, gives the date as October 21, 1845, which seems as authoritative as may be.

This, then, is "The Bernhardt's" sixty-first birthday—though that will appear scarce possible, as one sees this widow of Jacques Dumail (the wedding transpired in 1882), now a grandmother, issuing as briskly as a girl of twenty-eight from her home at 55 Boulevard Perle, gowned entirely in white flannels for some countryside excursion, or, perhaps, starting soon after eight of a sunny Parisian morning for her business office in her own theater.

Energy Personified.

Small wonder that the French capital exclaims: "What a woman!" At a time when other actresses are on the shelf this artist is sighing for new worlds to conquer. She is tireless. Her whole life has been what one might call a terrifying lesson to people who put off new responsibilities because they "haven't time."

Mme. Bernhardt, as most people know, is a sculptor whose busts and bronzes have won exposition medals. She is a painter whose tableaux have been honored in the salons. She is not only fond of all animals, but has made their habits and wants a serious study. As a general sportswoman she can do more (and do it better) than most of her sisters whose lives are given up to little else but sport. Whatever be the amount of stage work on hand she never by any chance misses her early morning fencing hour, while among all these and quite as many other things, she finds time for dress designing, embroidering, writing magazine articles, animal breeding, and botany.

Today, at an age when most matrons have forgotten what they learned at school, or at least "can't be bothered" with the acquirement of further knowledge, Madame Sara, with all and it may be a good deal more of the enthusiasm of the youthful student, is learning English. She is "all over" of instruction. She reads them in the train, in her carriage, in her dressing room, even in her bath, and she says the tongue is quite the most difficult of all she has yet attempted to master, though she feels free to add: "I can quite read and nearly understand M'sieur Browning."

That American Trip.

Yet the diva certainly needs no slight schooling in the tongue of Noah Webster and Lindley Murray! Her fourth American tour, but just closed, though it was indeed a triumphal march beyond any of its predecessors, demonstrated nothing more clearly than that the greatest of living actresses could not talk comfortable English.

But a complete success the trip surely was! Measure it by its \$250,000 profits, if you will—"velvet" which now goes to swell the fund which the earner spends no more lavishly upon her whims than on her many charities (one has the earnest testimony of her parish priest as to the truth of that)—and debit the account with all those trifling items of a Pittsburgh snowball fight, and the egg-throwing with which Quebec repaid a poorly reported interview, and her scolding the Youngstown (Ohio) audience from the very footlights, and the railway contretemps, which tossed the Madame from her

bath tub while whizzing across Kansas—take all this into the reckoning, and still that progress was as noteworthy in the annals of high art as anything the dramatic history of our stage has to show.

Frank Opinions—In French.

It surely was much to play "Camille" to 8,000 enthusiastic Texans, gathered in a tent. It was something to carry away a \$3,000 loving cup, and the only gold medal which the famous Cercle Francaise of Harvard University has ever presented to a woman. And who may say what effect the trans-continental tour had upon the powers which preside over France's Legion of Honor, that, at last and none too gracefully, they should have conferred upon the immortal premiere the coveted cross of their order?

Aprons of that Canadian misunderstanding, and whether or not Bernhardt ever spoke of her audiences there as "Troquois Indians," it is certain that a not dissimilar incident actually occurred in one of the Western States, during the trip. The piece given was one of the actress' problem plays, bringing with its climax one of those trades which the diva gives so tellingly. But, on the night in question, instead of voicing the lines as

written, here came out over the house the most fervid denunciation of the leading hotel of that Occidental town—the badness of its table, the hardness of its beds, the insolence and ignorance of its service, nothing was forgotten. "In all my travels," (this in the very best of good French) "I have never found a city where the people lived more nearly as do pigs!"

And the audience applauded rapturously!

Humor Plus Eccentricity.

Which little tale recalls another. In the death scene in "Camille," Marguerite, her eyes already glazing, exclaims, "I see a face!" referring to Armand's. Sara had a wretched house that night (her only thin one of the trip) and so, gazing seemingly into the unknown, her marvellous voice, realistically wailing for the instant, cried in deep pathos: "I see faces—faces—but not many faces!"

And again American courtesy (plus American ignorance of the lady's native tongue) burst into applause!

When last the diva was in London she gave a characteristic example of this her love of fun, as well as of her wondrous vitality. It was of a Sunday morning, and she found herself with an hour or more on her hands between trains. She must do something

to occupy the time ("Of course!") so, with Mrs. "Pat" Campbell and a few friends (gowned in light gray, with a great bunch of carnations—the gift of an admirer at the railway station) she started off for an impromptu visit to a certain Wardour street "wigwag." Presided over by a genius, in whose art Sara had such confidence that she never creates a new character without his "halcyon" assistance, the shop is the birthplace of all the wonderful wigs the theater-goer world knows so well—while it is fit to add that it was the actress herself who laid the cornerstone of the new offices.

Since that day of amateur trowel-and-mortar the hairdresser's had undergone many changes, and each of these had to be inspected and approved. The diva was as a child with a new

toy. Then her eye lit upon some magnificent French cabinets, once the property of the late Duke of Cambridge, and these were pounced upon as an especially happy find. They were full of stage jewels and souvenirs, which Bernhardt proceeded to auction off to a room full of imaginary bidders. There she frolicked, the greatest tragedienne the present-day world knows, bustling up and down in the grotesque exaggeration of the King's perriquet, evoking roars of laughter at her parody of that gentleman—under his very nose and roof.

If such genius as this be near kin to downright eccentricity, Madame Sara has shown it in other and yet more marked ways. She once slept five nights in a coffin "to acquire temperment." She once ordered \$300,000 worth of jewels at a sitting.

The Seven Goals of Her Ambition

- To see my own Parisian theater making money.
- To wear the most daring gown on the French stage.
- To bring that haughty and beautiful Alexandra of England to my feet.
- To play before the Sultan at Constantinople—and hear his applause.
- To drive through the Bois, with the hood of my carriage filled with violets.
- To appear before the Dowager Empress of China, playing in her native tongue.
- To play once more an ingenue part, that my public may see I am exactly as young as I was thirty years ago.

The Seven Fears of Her Existence

- The fear of being buried alive.
- The fear of becoming thin again.
- The fear that I may lose my beauty.
- The fear that my son may cease to love me.
- The fear I may grow old upon the stage.
- The fear that I may die rich in money—which is a sin.
- The fear that Victorien Sardou may think another actress as great as I.

She has paid \$1,700 for a single gown. She pins heart-whole faith in the luck brought her by a necklace of gold nuggets, once presented by some California miner admirer, and she has made pets of half the wild animals known to zoology.

"In the Greek Manner."

Perhaps the oddest, though, of all the odd things which Bernhardt has projected into the news of the day, happened at the breakfast which Edmond Rostand gave to the friends of "Cyrano" and "L'Aiglon" the day of his admission to the academic circle of the immortals. Sara, the guest, of honor, wore a marvelous gown, which had not only been designed and made for the occasion, but (evidently) was never to be worn again. At the close of the feast, she rose, and, in that impressive manner which commands at will, held high a wine glass and said: "I drink to the greatest of French dramatists, M'sieur Rostand, and I drink after the Greek manner!" Then she poured the contents of the goblet over head and gown!

For such a woman to become a member of the Society of Men of Letters is almost prosaic. Bernhardt's own "Adrienne Lecouvreur," however, on which she gained admission to that solemn band of litterateurs, is an excellent piece of play-writing. The critics praise it without stint, pointing, the while, to its clever situations and dialogue as full and sufficient excuse for the dramatic work of the author's son, Maurice. And when one reads in her preface such statements as the following, one is properly impressed. Is it not an authority which speaks from the chair?

"The dramatic art is essentially feminine. To paint one's face, to hide one's feelings, to try to please, to endeavor to attract attention—these are all the faults for which we blame women, even as we forgive them in a man such defects become nothing short of odious."

"The actor is naturally jealous of the actress. The courtesy of the well-educated man vanishes before the footlights. The actor, who, in private life, would render any service to a woman in difficulty, will pick a quarrel with her on the stage."

"The ermine may go upon the stage—let it! Yet no power on earth could induce me to adopt it for regular use. In the days of my youth, when I still had to bow to a mother's authority, I wore ermine under protest. And I found it an instrument of such torture that even then I registered a solemn vow never to submit to it again."

From Variety to "Legitimate."

The very controversy over her birthplace may well be held in evidence of Bernhardt's greatness. There is a legend that she first saw the light in the little hamlet on the banks of the Oder, that her parents were Germans, and that her father was a horse-dealer. The more accepted story tells of Paris as her native town, of a Havre lawyer as her father, and of a remarkably pretty daughter of Amsterdam as her mother. This "Mlle Julie" seems to have been a modiste, with a little shop situated in the Rue de la Michodiere, though when, at twenty-three, she married M. Bernhardt, the young couple set up their housekeeping at 5 Rue de l'Ecole de Medicine, where "Rosine" was born sixty-one years ago today. Rosine surely was the girl's christened name, nor is it clear just when the Sara was substituted; perhaps in her earlier years, during one of those frequent visits to the grandfather in Amsterdam, or, perhaps, during the school-days at the Convent of Grand Champs, near Versailles. Then came the conservatoire, and then the stage.

The Parisian footlights first displayed her to the theater-going world in the little "Haut Monde," a vaudeville house, where she had a mere song and dance. Think of it! And none to recognize her latest art till alone came Col. Horace Roblee, then American minister at Brussels. It was he who first was impressed by the young woman's subtle grace and that marvelous voice, of which no less an authority than Sada Yacco has written: "It is not to be adequately described. In its really marvellous intonations and infinite flexibility." Rublee set Bernhardt's case before the American minister to France, and through his

influence obtained that audience with the directory of the Comedie Francaise, which brought a trial in the role of Phedre—and after that one "try" Sara's path to her present glory was all flowery.

"Wizout M'sieur le Colonel," she said not so long ago, when telling of those earlier days, "vairre little goot would my art do. He find me in ze song and dance, an' he say, 'Sara, you are one daisy.' Ozer men see me again, an' zey nevalre see me to be one daisy. M'sieur le Colonel, he vaire well know."

From the Comedie to the Odeon, back to the Comedie and then to the Theatre de la Porte St. Martin, filled the years before foreign conquest began. England, America, Italy, Russia, Germany, and where not, followed, to be in their turn succeeded by the managing of the Renaissance, and at last by the establishment of the Theatre Sara Bernhardt, where the actress now rules in her own land, so to speak.

Behind the Scenes.

Speaking professionally, her life is the simplest. Her dressing room is no palatial affair; no draperies, no rugs or baubles, simply the room usually given to any leading lady, whether large or small. Frosted glass is her one and only request, and, naturally, she always gets it.

But in going to and from her "calls" the diva is a very queen. She is then always attended by sollicitous maids as well as one male escort to see her to the flies, where she is met by some friend, from whose arm she makes her entrance. The part over, she comes off with eyes flashing, a hand held out to the waiting hand of that same friend, and a relieved "Ah!" Yet this is not her ideal. That looks toward Belle Isle, her country home by the sea. "I long to run 100-foot over those dear rocks," she writes, "to watch the dashing spray and cry aloud with only the gulls to answer. I long for the wild freedom of that lonely out-of-doors, to dress as do the fish wives of the shore, to be far, far from the world of streets, and lights, and noises, I long to gather my grandchildren about me, and, like Niobe, to shed my tears for those that are not."

Perpetual Youth.

This may be the basis for the persistent rumor that Bernhardt contemplates retirement. It is sure that for some time past the actress has been condemning, in private conversation, the folly of the player who clings to the stage with quivering and enfeebled hands, and cannot see that a new generation of playgoers demand something more than a great name, won chiefly while they were still in their cradles. It is a continually haunting fear with Mme. Bernhardt lest she might one day hear herself spoken of as "a woman who used to be a really great actress."

On the other hand it comes upon the very best authority that she has advised Madame Patti never to retire while she can sing at all. In very apt use of any such thing as mere age, adding "providing I am able to act, I mean to retire, not a moment before I am seventy."

It is a safe guess that the actress will never look that age, even when she has reached and passed it. Not since the day of Madame Recamier has a woman in the public eye so marvelously maintained her youthful look. The lady herself declares the only secret about it lies in the frequent use of sour milk as an article of diet, with work and massage added. Which sounds very simple, indeed—and seemingly produces the required results. For Madame Bernhardt is the picture of well-preserved health. She is no longer thin, her hands are full and soft, while her face appears that of a woman of not more than forty at the most.

As to the art of this empress of the theater of today? Here superlatives are proper and exaggeration difficult. In technique she is unquestionably the foremost exponent of present-day academic culture in the drama, while in temperament she is the very embodiment of sentiment and passion—an essence of womanly spirit of infinite mood; the eternal child, impervious to the vicissitudes of life.

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